

From: Nancy Detrick, President of the Montana League of Women Voters

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Good morning, Madam Chairwoman and committee members. Thank you for providing the opportunity to speak to you this morning regarding HB254.

The League of Woman Voters is a nonpartisan political organization of women and men who encourage informed and active participation in government through education and advocacy. We do not support candidates or parties.

The League of Women Voters of Montana supports passage of HB254, "An act requiring a disclaimer on election materials distributed by a political committee that claims to be exempt from disclosing the names of contributors."

As a community-based organization born out of the struggle to win voting rights for women, one of the League's primary goals is to promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable, and responsive and that assures opportunities for citizen participation in government decision-making. To further this goal, the League – through it has been a leader in seeking campaign finance reform at the state, local and federal levels for more than three decades.

We are deeply concerned about the current state of political financing in our nation and Montana. Right now, there is a flood of secret money in our election system. Unlike a real flood, though, we can't tell where the money's coming from. Corporations, unions, lobbyists and special interests can now spend millions to get the elected officials they want into power. The law lets them do that in complete secrecy, allowing a few very loud voices, funded by incredible sums of money, to overwhelm and drown out other voices during elections.

In its ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, the Supreme Court opened the floodgates for big-money special interests in our elections. And one of the effects of the ruling is that the really big money can be spent in complete secrecy. Corporations, unions and wealthy individuals can now engage in unlimited secret spending to elect or defeat candidates. This is unacceptable in a representative system.

The most important thing we can do to preserve the integrity of our electoral process is to **increase transparency and let the sunshine in**. Disclosure of corporate, union and individual spending in our elections is the key to allowing voters to make their decisions.

The League of Women Voters believes Americans deserve all the information they can get before they vote. Secret campaign money has no place in America's democracy simply because it undermines the role of the voter and corrupts the election process. Voters have a right to know -- whether it is a corporation, union, trade association, or non-profit advocacy group making unlimited political expenditures and influencing elections.

By requiring a disclaimer on election materials that the communication has been funded by anonymous sources, it becomes the "responsibility of the voter to determine the veracity of the statements being made..."

HB254 is a step in the right direction. The League of Women Voters urges you to support this bill.

Thank you.